

'Treasures Of A Desert Kingdom' On Show At ROM

Opulent Collection In Exhibition Reflects Artistic Legacy Of The Rathore Dynasty Of Rajasthan

By Shazia Malik

TORONTO: The Royal Ontario Museum recently brought to Torontonians a spectacular royal arts and artifacts exhibition from one of India's largest former kingdoms, Jodhpur, Rajasthan - 'Treasures of a Desert Kingdom'.

On display were opulent but select jewellery pieces, lavish tents and canopies, palanquins, textiles, weapons, devotional objects, a 1927 Rolls Royce Phantom and huge paintings from the palace of Gaj Singh II, the current Maharaja of Marwar-Jodhpur.

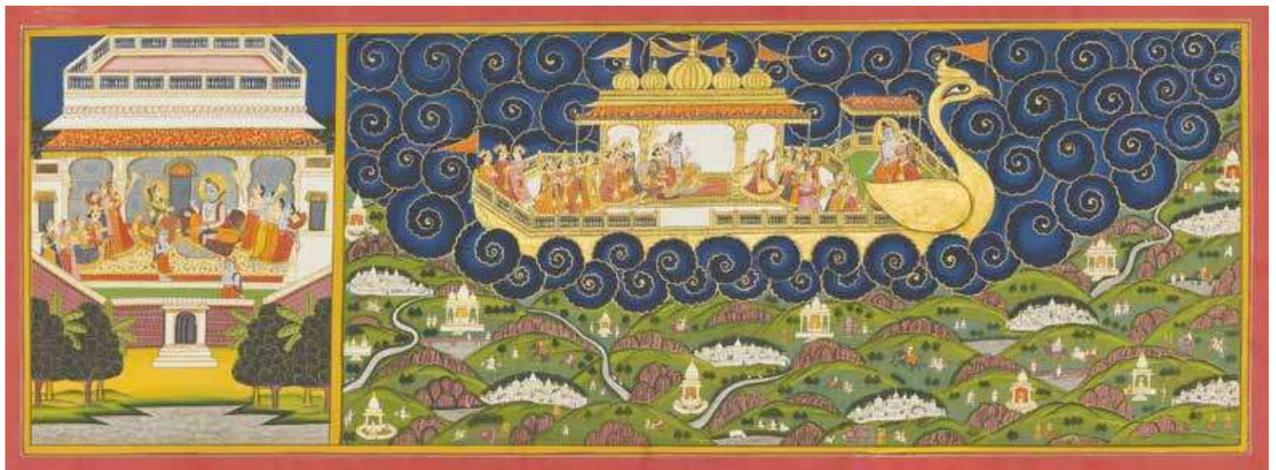
These treasures reflected the history and artistic legacy of the Rathore dynasty, one of the longest royal lineages in the world that ruled Rajasthan until India's independence in 1947.

Talking to Weekly Voice, Maharajah Gaj Singh II said that these masterpieces were never displayed out of the palace, adding: "Some of these prized possessions are from the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, established by the royal family in the early 1970s and some are from our private collection."

He said it was the third exhibition in North America and organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in collaboration with the Mehrangarh Museum Trust of India.

Outlining the dynamic history of the Marwar-Jodhpur region and the Rathore dynasty that ruled it for more than 700 years, the Maharajah said the objective of the exhibition was to give the large Indian diaspora residing in Toronto, a rare view of the royal treasures and bring them closer to Indian culture and tradition which is also part of the soft diplomacy.

When asked about the value of the total treasures, the Maharajah said: "I don't have the figure for you but these treasures are cher-



ished more for their centuries-old history and tradition and not so much for the price tag."

He revealed only a select few were cleared by the Indian government for taking out after finding out that an exhibition is being organized in USA - others were not allowed to leave India.

He also shared his Bollywood-style welcome on arrival from England to Jodhpur which he said: "Gave me immense happiness as I understood how the people of our state are still connected with us."

Maharajah Guj Singh also talked about the involvement of his daughter and son in community work.

He said: "My daughter is more involved in organizing cultural shows and concerts compared to my son, who helps his sister, but cannot spare so much of his time due to other commitments."

The Maharajah's daughter, Baijilal Shivranjani Rajye discussed how women in the state of Jodhpur are involved in various projects that she has initiated.

She also spoke about her mother's influence on her and how she plays a leadership role in her father's business. Princess Shivranjani is director of Jodhpur Heritage Resorts and Marushar Hotels, with the flagship property

- Umaid Bhawan Palace, rated as one of the world's best hotels.

Speaking on the occasion, Josh Basseches, ROM Director and CEO, said: "This landmark exhibition will not only captivate audiences, it will also offer a deeper understanding of India's artistic heritage and its continuing influence today."

Dinesh Bhatia, Indian Consul General in Toronto said: "The exhibition will give the people of Toronto a rare insight into India's multifaceted past and a better understanding about one of India's

longest princely states. The exhibition showcases some of the rare pieces from the royal treasures of Marwar-Jodhpur that were never seen before."

Dr Deepali Dewan, the exhibition's coordinating curator, informed that she was very excited and anxious to bring the exhibition from the USA to Toronto.

She also pointed out that art collections exhibited at the ROM are not for sale. The exhibition houses 250 objects from Indian courtly life and describes the rich history of Rathores.

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